The Process Writing Approach in Bhutan:

A case of cross-national policy borrowing

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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(Signed): .............................................................. (Candidate)
Date: August 2013
Dedication

First of all I would like to dedicate this work to my late father, Sonam Wangchuk and mother, Pema Dechen who were both teachers. My father’s passion on using various modern methods to teach English in contrast to my mother’s keenness for rote learning of prayers in Dzongkha, their differences on the preference of methods inspired me to explore the current Bhutanese teachers view on “Process Writing Approach,” an approach from a different culture.

I would also like to dedicate this work to Werner Christen, my husband. His passion and interest in different cultures and his role more as a father to me with his special undying love and care inspired me to take up this project.

Next, I would like to dedicate this work to my one and only daughter, Sonam Peldon. Sonam’s extremely mature, sensible and hardworking character inspired me continuously. She was always there as a good role model for me.

Finally I dedicate this work to my country and government for making me who I am now.
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“Thousands of candles can be lit from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared”.  (Gautama Buddha)

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Definition of Key Terms

The key terms related to this research have been explained within the context of the study as in the following:

**Borrowing**: Educational borrowing in this research context means transferring educational practices from elsewhere to improve education at home. This transfer of practices can be imposed by one nation on another, agreement between two nations or borrowing out of the borrowing country’s interest.

**Class and grades**: Class is a term used in Bhutan for students’ level in the school. In this study the term grades will be used for the different levels instead of class. And class will be used for a group of students during observation for example “grade seven class”. This means a group of level seven students.

**Grade four and grade seven**: Grade four is equivalent to year four in Australia (10 years old) and grade seven is equivalent to year seven (13 years old).

**Symbols used for reporting Interview with the principals**

*P.*: when reporting on the interview with the principals, upper case P is used with the participant’s number (e.g. “P 3”).

*p.*: The page number of the interview transcription is indicated with a lower case p. and the number (e.g. “p. 3”)

**Symbols used for teachers involved in classroom observation and interviews**

*T.*: when reporting on the teachers whose lessons are observed, upper case T. is used with the participant’s number (e.g. T 1)

*TO*: The teachers who observed the video recorded lesson, upper case T and O is used with the participant’s number (e.g. TO 1).

**Acronyms**

- **PWA** Process Writing Approach
- **NES** Native English speaker/speaking
- **NNS** Non-native speaker/speaking
- **ELL** English language learner
- **ESL** English as a second language
Abstract

Borrowing policy from one national context to another by merely copying a practice has been described as largely superficial and unsuccessful. Evidence has shown that countries who carefully studied the appropriateness to and suitability of borrowed policy in the local context have been more successful in implementing it.

Bhutan uses writing in English for assessing students at the secondary level, notwithstanding the country’s strong commitment to maintaining its cultural integrity. Failure in examinations written in this foreign language will result in student retention at the same level or departure from school. Grade seven seems to have the highest rate of failures and school dropouts in Bhutan.

The Process Writing Approach (hereafter referred to as PWA) was proposed as a part of the Bhutanese revised English curriculum in 2006. It was originally developed for native speakers of English but was introduced in Bhutan to address internal dissatisfaction with student writing. PWA involves active participation of the students in writing multiple drafts in contrast to the old practice where students simply wrote answers to questions from textbooks or made notes from teacher presentations.

This sequential qualitative study examined the alignment between stated intentions, suggested activities and, assessment practices in the 2006 English curriculum documents for grade seven. The study involved interviews of school principals and video recording of classroom lessons, which subsequently provided stimulus for interviewing teachers regarding cultural influences on implementation of PWA. The field work took place six years after implementation of the borrowed policy.

The comparative documentary analysis revealed extreme misalignment within the different sections of the English Teachers’ Guide for grade seven and other supporting curriculum documents for teaching PWA. The interviews and observations exposed numerous challenges to implementation. These challenges mainly related to teachers’ training, their understanding of the new practice and Bhutanese cultural and contextual factors. However, the study also revealed positive teacher attitudes towards PWA and on-going commitment to implementation that led Bhutanese teachers to take a variety of initiatives.

The study suggests that curriculum planners should work towards the consistency of objectives, activities and assessment in curriculum development. Use of longer and more appropriate training during the process of curriculum development may anticipate cross cultural mismatches between foreign methodology and existing local context and help teachers to accommodate the cultural shifts involved in cross-national policy borrowing.

This research in Bhutan may benefit educators working in English as Second Language (ESL) cultural contexts similar to Bhutan. The main issues discovered in this particular study may also assist in developing curriculum in either small project or aid-based educational jurisdictions.